

DECISION NOTICE: Tongue River Reservoir State Park Enhancement

Tongue River State Park
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Industrial Site West
P O Box 1630
Miles City, MT 59301
(406) 232-0900

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

The proposed project is for that portion of Tongue River Reservoir State Park consisting of the park roads from Hwy. 314 to 100 yards beyond the Sand Point turn-off, Rattlesnake Point, Camper's Point, Pee Wee Point, and Sand Point. As the proposed project is extensive, proposed work will be separated by park-wide projects and specific areas (Rattlesnake Point, Camper's Point, Pee Wee Point, and Sand Point).

Park-wide projects

1. Provide upgraded electrical from Tongue River Dam to the park. Currently the park is at capacity for its electrical service. Tongue River Electric Coop will upgrade the electrical system to allow for expansion within the park. Outside of the park, the electric lines are overhead on power poles and this would allow the project to be completed over the winter.
2. Upgrade water system for the park. Current water use demands exceeded existing well production and cistern storage capacity. With the proposed improvements to the park (i.e., new housing, additional fish cleaning station, and installation of a comfort station) upgrading the water system is imperative. The upgrade will include a combination of wells and surface water treatment (with a pump and small water treatment plant). Upgrading the water system will allow for expansion in the park and provide safe water for visitors and staff members.
3. Pave road from Hwy 314 to a point approximately 100 yards past Sand Point turn-off (Appendix 2: Site Plan, Keynote #1). MFWP will collaborate with Bighorn County and DNRC State Water Project Bureau in order to complete this project. There is a significant dust problem within the park and the county road is the highest source of dust within the park.

Rattlesnake Point Projects

1. Pave and improve park roads and parking area at Rattlesnake Point (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, Keynote #2, and Site Plan, Rattlesnake Point Improvements). As described earlier, there is a significant dust problem within the park. Paving the interior park roads will decrease the amount of dust in the park. In addition, paving the interior roads will accommodate the number and type of visitors to the park.

Camper's Point Projects

1. Construct employee housing for workers at the administrative storage area at Camper's Point (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, keynote #8). Two three-bedroom houses will be constructed. One house is intended for a recreational Warden and family. One house is intended for seasonal workers. Seasonal workers are currently housed at a small ranch house located at Rosebud Battlefield State Park some 15 miles from Camper's Point and temporary locations around the park that are usually designated for visitors. With the increased usage of the park, these locations can no longer accommodate both visitors and seasonal workers. There are few potential employees near Tongue River Reservoir; most employees come from Sheridan, Wyoming. The commute from Sheridan is 30 miles one way. With the increase in gas prices and increase in jobs in the Sheridan area due to the boom in energy development and associated service industries, most potential employees are unwilling to commute to the park. Establishing permanent housing at the park will encourage more potential employees to seek work at the park.
2. Install electrical pedestals at 40 existing camp pads (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, keynote #6). Electrification of the camp loop would enable management of the park to better meet visitor expectations and enhance the recreational experience for campers. During the extended periods of 100 + temperatures campers without generators would be able to use air conditioning, boat batteries would be able to be recharged, and many other uses and options now available in RV's would be available to visitors. Modern motor homes and campers are all equipped for electrical service. A decrease in generator use is expected to reduce noise levels in the campground. Other benefits include a reduction in gasoline spills from fueling generators and a corresponding reduction in the chance of fire from improper use and or storage of gasoline in containers.
3. Install a new drain field. The drain field at Camper's Point is at capacity. Installing a new drain field will be required with the construction of new employee housing and the Comfort Station. The drain field will initially be constructed for the seasonal housing and will be extended when the comfort station is constructed (see Priority List for further explanation). The new drain field will likely be located behind the current dry dock area at the administrative support area at Camper's Point.
4. Construct a new maintenance and enforcement shop/storage building (40 by 40 feet) at the Administrative Support Area at Camper's point (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, keynote #7). More covered area is needed for maintenance projects. In addition, more covered area is needed to protect park equipment from the elements.
5. Construct a comfort station with flush toilets and showers (including ADA showers) near concession building (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, Keynote #3). The showers will be coin-operated to offset costs associated with a projected increase in utilities and maintenance. Currently, there is no comfort station located at Tongue River Reservoir State Park. With the

increased use of the park, the current vault latrines cannot accommodate visitors to the site, and campers do not currently have a shower option in this area of the park. In addition, the new employee housing drain field will be expanded to accommodate the new comfort station.

6. Pave all interior park roads, and expand and pave existing boat ramp parking lot at Camper's Point (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, Keynote #2). As described earlier, there is a significant dust problem within the park. Paving the interior park roads will decrease the amount of dust in the park. In addition, paving the interior roads will accommodate the number and type of visitors to the park. Existing boat ramp parking lot is not large enough to accommodate current use. Establishing individual parking spots through paving and striping, will maximize parking capacity

Pee Wee Point Projects

1. Construct a fish cleaning station (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, keynote #5). Currently, there is no fish cleaning station at Pee Wee Point, yet many anglers utilize this site for fishing and boat launching. The fish cleaning station will provide an environmentally safe and acceptable fish-cleaning site. The existing water system at Pee Wee Point will be modified to accommodate the additional use from the fish cleaning station. In addition, a new drain field will be designed to accommodate the septic waste from the fish cleaning station.
2. Pave all interior park roads at Pee Wee Point (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, Keynote #2). As described earlier, there is a significant dust problem within the park. Paving the interior park roads will decrease the amount of dust in the park. In addition, paving the interior roads will accommodate the number and type of visitors to the park.
3. Designate and improve campground campsites at Pee Wee Point. Camp pads will be developed, extended, and hardened in the existing campground. Currently visitors camp on undesignated areas in the campground. The recent drought has caused the grass to die and led to dust problems in the area. This project will add control to the campground and protect the site.
4. Install picnic shelters at Pee Wee Point. With the increase in visitors to the park, more picnic shelters are needed.

Sand Point Projects

1. Install a new camp loop with approximately 36 new camp pads (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, keynote #4, and Site Plan, Sand Point Improvements). Each camp pad will have a gravel camp pad, picnic table and fire ring. A new vault latrine will be installed in the new camp loop. The Sand Point Area is very popular for its more rustic appeal and beach. The current campground cannot accommodate the increase in visitors.
2. Pave all interior park roads at Sand Point (Appendix 2: Overall Site Plan, Keynote #2). As described earlier, there is a significant dust problem within the park. Paving the interior park roads will decrease the amount of

dust in the park. In addition, paving the interior roads will accommodate the number and type of visitors to the park.

This environmental assessment encompasses numerous projects at the park. As with any proposed project, money and time are in a limited supply. MFWP, Region 7 has drafted a priority list for these projects based on need, time, and money. The projects have been broken down into two phases. With Phase-one, being the most needed projects and Phase-two being the next step for the park.

Priority List

Phase-one

1. Upgrade electrical system for the entire park
2. Construct a shop/maintenance building at Camper's point.
3. Construct employee housing at Camper's point (install a new drain field as well).
4. Electrify the camp loop at Camper's point.
5. Improve campground at Pee Wee Point and add picnic shelters
6. Construct a new camp loop at Sand Point.
7. Construct a fish cleaning station at Pee Wee Point.
8. Upgrade water system for the entire park
9. Pave interior roads at Camper's Point.
10. Pave interior roads at Sand Point.
11. Pave interior roads at Pee Wee Point.
12. Pave interior roads at Rattlesnake Point.

Phase-two

1. Pave the county road from Hwy 314 to 100 yards past Sand Point turn-off.
2. Construct a comfort station at Camper's Point (expand employee housing drain field).

PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

The public comment period began August 8, 2006 and ran through September 15, 2006. An addendum was released September 15, 2006 and public comment continued until October 18, 2006. Legal notices were on the Montana State's electronic bulletin board and copies of the Environmental Assessment were distributed to various individuals, organizations, and county, state and federal agencies. Comments were received with all in support of the project, including one comment on the status of the county road, and several questions that are listed and answered below.

1. Page 9, Paragraph 6: **Comment:** The Draft EA discusses increased water use and demand as a result of the proposed action. What type of water treatment plant will be developed to treat the water needed for the proposed action? How will this plant be maintained and who will be responsible for maintenance? **Response:** The proposed improvements will result in increased water use and demand. In order to meet the increased demand, a new well will be drilled at Camper's Pt. The new

well will be paired with an existing well to produce 30 gallons per minute yield. The wells will pump water into a new 12,000-gallon concrete storage cistern. Preliminary calculations indicate that the wells combined with cistern storage will supply enough water for all the proposed developments at Camper's Pt.

2. Page 10, Paragraph 5: **Comment:** The EA discusses the installation of a new septic drain field to accommodate the new employee housing and convenience station as part of the proposed project. Will a drain field in the area be adequate to handle the large volumes of water associated with showers and flushing toilets that will be in operation all day during the recreation season? If not, how will the excess water be handled? Has any consideration been given to mechanical wastewater treatment or a combination of treatment options? **Response:** New septic drain fields will be designed for the proposed improvements as required. The waste water systems will be permitted through the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The design engineer has determined that a mechanical wastewater treatment system is unnecessary at this site.
3. Page 11, Paragraphs 1,2,3: **Comment:** It appears that a number of new buildings are to be constructed as part of the proposed project. Has any consideration been given to the aesthetics of the new buildings associated with the recreation area? **Response:** Aesthetics of the new buildings has been considered in the design.
4. Page 21: **Comment:** What pertinent permits will the State be obtaining to ensure that water quality is not degraded within and adjacent to the proposed project? What mitigation actions will be taken to eliminate or reduce impacts to water quality as a result of the construction actions associated with the proposed project? **Response:** The Department will obtain a water right for less than 35 gallons per minute with the Montana Department of Natural Resources; a permit for a Small Transient Public Water System from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Public Water Supply Section; a Groundwater Discharge Permit from the Department of Environmental Quality; and a Storm water Discharge Permit from the Department of Environmental Quality, Water Protection Bureau. Mitigation actions taken to eliminate or reduce impacts to water quality as a result of the construction actions will be detailed in the permits.
5. Page 23: **Comment:** Has the State of Montana consulted with the Northern Cheyenne Tribe with regard to potential culturally significant plant species that may exist in the proposed project area? **Response:** No. The proposed project area is located in previously developed areas.
6. Page 24: **Comment:** Both Bald Eagles and Osprey exist in and around the proposed project area. Will any special requirements be necessary to

protect these species from activities associated with the proposed project?
Response: No. The proposed project area is located in previously developed areas. All nesting areas lie a good distance south of the proposed project area.

7. Page 28: **Comment:** While the paving of roads may reduce some traffic hazards will potential hazards from speeding be addressed through implementation of speed reduction methods such as speed bumps or increased police patrols? **Response:** Speed limits will be posted. Coordination with Bighorn County is necessary to see that speed limits are adhered to. Fish, Wildlife and Parks has increased presence by hiring a recreational warden based out of Decker.
8. Page 29, Paragraph 10(a): **Comment:** No discussion is given to the increased need for governmental services (i.e. Police, EMS, Fire Protection) as a result of increased usage of the park arising from the greater number of recreationists. **Response:** The proposed project is not to increase visitation, but to address current use levels. The current visitation exceeds the current design. Fish, Wildlife and Parks has increased enforcement presence by hiring a recreational warden based out of Decker.
9. Page 29, Paragraph 10©: **Comment:** No discussion is provided related to the increased demand for utilities and services as a result of the proposed project. **Response:** Tongue River Electric Coop has determined that the existing overhead power line to the recreation site is adequate to handle the proposed improvements. Additional transformers will be necessary within the recreation site.
10. Page 29, 10(d): **Comment:** No discussion is presented to the increased consumption of any energy source as a result of the proposed project. **Response:** Increased energy consumption at the State Park will occur once the proposed improvements are completed.
11. Page 31: **Comment:** Has the Northern Cheyenne Tribe been consulted under the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Consultation Process with regards to Historic or Cultural values in the area of the proposed project? **Response:** On June 30, 2006 a letter was sent to the Northern Cheyenne Tribal Historic Preservation Office. No reply was received; therefore, we have assumed concurrence with our recommendations.
12. Page 32: **Comment:** A discussion of the cumulative impacts arising from the proposed project in conjunction with the Tribe's Casino Project and potential mitigation should be presented here. **Response:** The proposed project is designed to address **current** use levels experienced at Tongue River State Park. Any future projects that may increase impacts

will evaluate those possibilities through the Environmental Assessment process.

13. Section 1 of Phase 2: **Comment:** The Board of Commissioners herewith, have determined that said road is not a county road. **Response:** Noted and corrected.

DECISION

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and the applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared. This project is not designed to increased visitor use, but to accommodate current use, which has exceeded the park's current amenities.

It is my decision to implement the proposed action, and proceed with the enhancement project as identified in the EA.

By notification of this Decision Notice, the draft EA is hereby made the final EA without any modifications or additions. The final EA may be viewed at or obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the above address.

Please direct any further requests or questions to Bryce Christensen, Region 7 Supervisor, or John Little, Region 7 Park Manager.



November 10, 2006

Bryce Christensen, Regional Supervisor